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16 August 1968

MEMORANDUM TO: Nathaniel Davis

SUBJECT : The Scenario at Cierna (29 July-1 August 1968)

1. It is difficult to establish a precise chronology of developments at Cierna because of the vast amount of unsourced or poorly sourced stories that circulated at the time and because almost all the reports that can be sourced go back ultimately to the Czechoslovak side of the table. In particular, there is a gap in our knowledge of what went on inside the Soviet delegation during this four-day period.

2. There does seem to be general agreement that Brezhnev, probably followed by other Soviets, led off the talks with a harshly worded attack on the performance and record of the Czechoslovak leaders and that the Czechoslovaks responded in kind. There was apparently little if any effort by the two sides to reconcile their differences during the first day-and-a-half or two days of the talks. There is conflicting evidence as to whether it was Dubcek or Svoboda who made the main presentation for the Czechs in this phase of the talks but, in any case, the Czech leaders seem to have stayed together, at least when they were face to face with the Russians.

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3. [redacted] we feel that the Soviets originally demanded that the Czechoslovaks accept a joint Soviet-Czechoslovak defence of their western frontiers, the re-establishment of press censorship, the elimination of several reformist members of the party leadership, curbs on the non-Communist parties of the National Front, the suppression of allegedly counter-revolutionary organizations, and sweeping foreign policy and trade guarantees. According to most versions of this initial exchange--including a version being bruited about by the Hungarians--all members of the Czechoslovak delegation who spoke during the opening sessions rejected the Soviet demands in toto.

25X1

4. It seems fairly certain that the two sides began to move toward a compromise probably late on 30 July. [redacted] Svoboda with playing a major role in inducing the Soviets to adopt a more "conciliatory" attitude. [redacted]

25X1

[redacted] Svoboda delivered a highly emotional and strongly-worded speech on 30 July in which he reminded the Soviets of his many services to the common cause and threatened to resign if no agreement could be reached. [redacted]

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However, the Czechoslovaks may have "given" a little of their substantive position on that day as well. Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Hajek reportedly spoke disconsolately on 31 July of Czechoslovak "concessions."

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5. The first solid sign that an agreement was being reached was the abrupt end to press polemics on 31 July. On that same day, the negotiations were interrupted in mid-session. The interruption has been variously attributed to a brief illness of Brezhnev or to a potential breakdown in the talks. Without better information, we cannot say what happened at this crucial point. If the talks were near collapse, the question of a Soviet military presence in Czechoslovakia may have been the reason.

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6. Hajek reportedly said that day that the
so-called secret "Novotny agreement"

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[redacted] which would permit the Soviets to station
two divisions within Czechoslovakia was proving
to be the main obstacle to agreement.

7. It was also on 31 July that the Soviet
delegation reportedly received letters from
Yugoslavia, Rumania and others warning the Soviets
of the dangers of military intervention. On the
other hand, Ulbricht was said to have opposed
compromise in a telephone conversation with the
Russian delegation. Whatever the net effect of
this outside pressure, the essentials of the
agreement were reached that day.

8. There is even circumstantial evidence
that the Cierna communique was ready on 31 July.
When it was published the next day, it included
not only the invitations to Bratislava, but the
acceptances by the other East Europeans. We
assume therefore that a good part of the night of
31 July-1 August was spent working on the more
detailed document to be presented at Bratislava.

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MEMORANDUM FOR:

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This report, done on short notice, was sent to Nat Davis by courier today. Davis requested it on behalf of his boss, Walt Rostow. Also at Davis' request copies of the raw sources used were sent and his copy of the reconstruction memo was annotated to reflect where each source was used.

16 Aug 68
(DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.

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